

**Theatre Technology: Nigeria's Indigenous Alternatives in Molinta  
Enendu's Experimental Designs**

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**Abstract**

*The Nigerian theatre of the European tradition, which the academic institutions in Nigeria adopted required similar facilities. Technically, the quality of the infrastructure expected to create theatrical scenery, and subsequently produce the spectacle for theatrical performances cannot exist if there are no visionary designers with the will to pursue its development. The cost of building an arts theatre for universities and cultural institutions in Nigerian is enormous. The implication was to look inwards, and this provided an opportunity for designers with the imaginations for local alternatives. In the following years, young theatre professionals emerged, and one of them is Molinta Enendu whose bold theatre stage undertakings deserve a mention in the development of performance spaces. This paper examined the remodeling of, and the experimental installations of stage facilities in two Nigerian theatres and one state cultural centre in the south-south and north central parts of Nigeria. Findings show that Enendu's indigenous alternative functionally matched their foreign examples thirty years on.*

**Key words:** Nigerian theatre, Cultural institution, Molinta Enendu, Indigenous alternative, Moving Scenery.

**Introduction and Reminiscences**

Industrially, the facilities and the fixtures for the enablement of theatre technology is at the least of Nigeria's technological inventiveness. The reason is tied to the core of Nigeria's industrial backwardness. That is, the engineering profession and its inability to produce locally, the needs of Nigeria's industries, and by implication, the broad-based technologies behind motorised equipment, which drive the machineries behind theatrical operations and aesthetics. These are in the areas of stage lighting<sup>1</sup>, theatre sound and musical<sup>2</sup>, scenery construction and operation<sup>3</sup>. These areas have depended largely on electrical and mechanical equipment developed for the theatre, and located in the standard theatre spaces<sup>4</sup>. Sadly, other than the acting talents, technical repairs

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<sup>1</sup> See Birringer, Johannes. "Contemporary Performance/Technology." *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 4 (1999): 361–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068706>.

<sup>2</sup> See Burston, Jonathan. "Theatre Space as Virtual Place: Audio Technology, the Reconfigured Singing Body, and the Megamusical." *Popular Music* 17, no. 2 (1998): 205–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/853456>.

<sup>3</sup> See Gillette, Michael. *Theatrical design and production: an introduction to scene design and make-up*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Mayfield Publishing, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See Burris-Meyer, Harrold & Cole E. Cole. *Theatres and auditoriums*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1975.



and space modification, not one item of theatre performance is industrially manufactured in Nigeria. "Techne" as it were, is a combination of the application of theatre craft encompassing the human processes that shape its use, to which Aristotle prenoted. These technologies, notes Lavender (2008:1-2)<sup>5</sup>, rather than area specific, is a transformation that grew from performative consciousness. Progressively, these developments accommodate digital technologies in media, motion capture, computer animation and projection, extends beyond photography and film. These as elaborated in (Birringer 1999:2)<sup>6</sup> could only sum theatrically toward digital scenography.

From the ingenious approach of importing the gods through *deus ex machina* to the comparatively miniature *ekkyklemma*, the Greek introduced both the mega and miniature technology of movable scenery of theatre for the audience enjoyment of dramatic performances. Whether to lower or to elevate scenic pieces, or to change the ambiances through revolving prisms, the Greek theatre led the way to heightening the impact of theatre experience through innovative implements. Between on stage (i.e. above in the flies) and off stage (i.e. backstage), these movable mechanical tools became inevitable acquisitions in theatrical performances. They were also the precursors of modern theatre technology, and as theatre tradition spread, successive inheritors replicated them within the abilities of their local professionals.

The importance of design in the creation of a performance environment is evidenced in the interactions between actors, crew, coupled with inputs for transformative ambiances, which remain dynamic, supported by the rapid flow of technological advancements. For this reason, technology has progressed to uplift and change the outlook of the way theatre facilities were known to have evolved from earlier generations. Theatrically, modern designers rely on the technologies developed by engineering to deliver new arts of theatrical entertainment. This is opposed to the methods adopted by designers of earlier generations, glaringly stamping the difference between an analogue and a digital era. However, the bottom line of the various techniques and approaches was usually to create an environment for dramatic performance by its own technologists.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria therefore, Molinta Enendu , Duro Oni, and Sumbo Marinho are taken as a contact to discuss the part of scenic design as did Appia, Craig, Jones and others whose ideas helped to shape design thoughts; just as it is not unaware of the objections that historically trailed it.<sup>7</sup> The methods have moved from mere nothing or the empty environment of the classical period, to the wrought iron age of the medieval, to the combined analogue system of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and finally, the digital simplicity of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatre.

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<sup>5</sup> Lavender, Andy. Mary Luckhurst (Ed.), *Theatre and Technology: A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 551-562.

<sup>6</sup> Birringer, Johannes. "Contemporary Performance/Technology." *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 4 (1999): 361-81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068706>.

<sup>7</sup> See Craig, Gordon. "The Art of the Theatre: The First Dialogue". *Theories of the Modern Stage*. Bentley E. Ed. New York: Penguin. 1998. 1: 113-137.

Luckily, Nigerian theatre shares the technology of the European tradition from which it inherited its modern theatre. Consequently, it has, in some cases, stepped up its theatre architecture and technical facility for the demands of 20th-century theatre practice, and the development is ongoing. The National Theatre of Nigeria, in concept, design, and equipment is supposed to live up to the billing of providing modern theatrical experience in terms of materially and technologically based spectacles, but for poor maintenance hiccups and equipment upgrades for recency.

It is the position of this study that technically, theatre experience depends on the amount of spectacle created in a performance, which corresponds to the degree of technical facility, proficiency and design vision. Such spectacles are created as spontaneously as reversals emerge in the plot of the story. Therefore, spectacle from technical perspective, is created when a union of material forces (scenery and electro-mechanical) interact with human action in reaction to the promptings of dialogue. This technical response generates the essence of theatrical interest known as theatre experience.

The standard of infrastructure required to create theatrical scenery, and subsequently produce spectacle for production cannot exist if there are no visionary designers with the will to pursue its development. For this reason, Molinta Enendu deserves a mention in the development of a workable approach in the area of moving scenery a significant aspect of spectacle. He has also contributed to the development and renovation of theatre spaces within the South-South geopolitical zone, and by implication, in Nigeria.

Aristotle listed spectacle as one of the elements of theatre performance. At that time, it is unlikely that he gave serious thought to scenery as a major component of theatre spectacle. By about mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century when Aristotle wrote his *Poetics*, theatre lighting had not been discovered, neither had scenic architecture become a prominent and domineering visual part of theatre scenery. Comparatively, scenic spectacle was at a rudimentary stage, even though historians believe that a scenic spectacle of high proportion did feature in some of the production like Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* about the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

In the days of Aristotle, music, dances, processions, costumes and masks formed the major scenic spectacles. It then means that the actor was the main object of spectacle in that the audience was not interested in singling out the individual elements of the performances which they saw. In other words, as Brockett explains, the actor was the total theatre because in the actor were all other objects of spectacle; he sang the song (music), did the dance (or procession), and wore the costume and mask.<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that these responsibilities still remain with the human actor on stage but modern scenery has made it possible that while the actor is busy with dialogue and movement, other scenic activities help to create an atmosphere which makes the drama flow as a natural course of event. Thus, from indoor to outdoor performances; the importation of sea, sky, and mountains, along with its climatic changes and

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<sup>8</sup> Brockett, Oscar. G. *History of the Theatre*. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon., Mass, 1999.

behaviours puts dramatic action in its natural ambiance. This situation enriches the action aesthetically and tells the story better.

Even so, machinery existed early enough to make feasible the visits and interventions of the gods a more believable supernatural act. Despite the size of the machine, man remained the object of attention, and for which every other scenic element functioned, giving spectacle to his courses of action when necessary. In fact, it can be said that spectacle was an attribute of both the story and the actor; the story being how well the plot is structured, and the act being how well the actor portrayed the character to release what Aristotle calls the “purgation” of emotions, and which without doubt spurred the enjoyment.

The classical theatre dramas were highly dependent on poetic dialogue, this did not prevent the playwrights from fully describing the setting as best and as natural as they could imagine, because historians, as documented by Brockett, contend that “spoken décor” was an accepted convention.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it still emphasized the fact that scenery and the allied support of material action was complementary and inevitable in dramatic performances.

In recent times, as in the miracle plays of the medieval era, with the appraisal of performance aesthetics, material elements are becoming increasingly recognized as vital and indispensable mix in drama, even though it may not necessarily be the object of drama, but they continue to stand out as material vehicle to the enjoyment of theatre. Recognizing material contribution as an artistic voice maybe too much to ask for, nonetheless, there lies a great imbalance in the treatment between human and material element when assessing a theatrical performance. According to Shomit Mitter, this is because over the years, critics have concentrated so much on those features of the theatre that are dictated by the author’s text; the most prominent feature being the actor and his dialogue. Mitter in *Systems of Rehearsal* observes that:

There is a curious asymmetry in contemporary theatre studies. On the one hand theatre historians admit that drama criticism must include analysis of performance. They argue that as theatre is a compound entity comprising both speech and action. Criticism must find ways of addressing theatre’s non-verbal element.<sup>10</sup>

This then is a major thesis in support of this research in that material elements as objects of design appear neglected in critical appreciation as do the masses in political set ups, where the masses are almost inconsequential until their count is required at the ballot. It is absolutely necessary to address this seeming “asymmetry” because it is on records that the actor’s ability, almost all the time, requires the support of visual aesthetic elements like light and costume to uplift their assigned heroic status. In *The Theories of the Modern Stage*, Luigi Pirandello reveals that the wonderful actress of her time, Eleanora Duce was “Natively lacking in that roundness of diction which is a prime requisite for the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>10</sup> Mitter, Shomitz. *Systems Of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook*. London: Routledge, 1972. 1.

full elaboration of a word picture. For her art is wholly and always an art of movement".<sup>11</sup> So what Duce lacked in the act which speech offers she made up with the gift of bodily expression. Likewise, Pirandello was trying to emphasize the power of expression that lies in movement and gestures. But not only that, a whole new world of scenic beauty and splendour was created to bath the ordinary stage in order to elevate the personality of Duce in her dramatic role. How did this come about? It was a conglomeration of "Progressive attitudes, each one made definite and precise in its particular aesthetic value, pictorial, musical or sculpturesque, as the case may be".<sup>12</sup> We can complement this illustration with Adolph Appia's design for Loie Fuller, where the substantial impulse of the emotional attribute conveyed by her costume was actually invoked by music. Stage Lighting was able to create a:

Moving image made animate by the projection of coloured light and slide...the movement of her costume, made from hundreds of yards of fine silk, lit from many directions created an extraordinary effect...by means of flame and smoke.<sup>13</sup>

The art of dramatic performance is rooted in the art of entertainment. The uniqueness of theatre lies in the fact that it is education through dramatic delivery of entertainment, not information through news casting. A major technique that makes it a programme worth the distance is the promise of excitement and spectacle. We can compare the play to a motor vehicle; where its functions become more enjoyable when the facilities in it become more comfortable. For instance, what makes a car comfortable is not the engine; for the engine only sits on a chassis, a cold metal hooked to a propeller; movement is then made possible by the rubber tyres. The issue of comfort is a completely different ball game, which is the reason for an upholstered housing. We also know the function of audio-visual equipment in the automobile; it is purely entertainment.

A play goes beyond a text to represent the complex thoughts of one individual whose perception, experience and power of observation requires the equal power, experience and the perception of another to interpret. Luigi Pirandello, rightly observes as a writer that:

As a play passes from the mind of an author through the mind of an actor, it must inevitably undergo some modification. No matter how hard the actor tries to grasp the intention of the writer, he will never quite succeed in seeing the intention of the writer, he will never quite succeed in seeing a character just as the author saw, in feeling it just as the author felt it, in recreating it just as the author willed that it should be.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pirandello, Luigi. "Eleanora Duce". *The Theory of the modern stage: an introduction to modern theatre and drama*. Bentley, E. Ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1988. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 165

<sup>13</sup> Roose-Evans, J. *Experimental Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1998. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Bentley, Eric. (1988). *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. Bentley, E. Ed. New York: Penguin, 1998. 166.

This is the reason why many heads in all areas of the theatre come together to seek interpretation to the work of a single head. Luigi Pirandello was that kind of an author who believed that no interpretation was good enough for his work, not the least technical interpretation. His hostility to technical may in fact be a major influence on directors like Grotowski. Pirandello had insisted that playwrights should desist from "Sacrificing anything to those foolish technical requirements that can only control a work's surface...All descriptive and narrative props should be banished from the stage".<sup>15</sup>

In a 1904 article, "The Play, the Play and The Scene", W.B. Yeats had raised a similar objection in the wake of technological intrusion in the theatre to punctuate the rhythmic flow of poetry in what seems like a distraction to dialogue. He demanded for "a new kind of scenic art..." lamenting that:

Ever since the last remnant of the old platform disappeared, and the proscenium grew into the frame of a picture, the actors have been turned into a picturesque group in the foreground of a meretricious landscape painting.<sup>16</sup>

Yeats was not against scenery but called for the reduction of the awesome presence of scenery both in the size of the set and the projection of scenic spectacle that seem to make the actor appear like creation of fantasy, and not a bearer of strong issues of socio-economic relevance.

The proscenium stage is the culprit in the architectural form that best supports the illusion against which Yeats submits his demand for new scenic art. However, other types of stages have their limitations when it comes to illusionistic performance but they rank higher in Yeats' proposal for the reduction of elaborate scenery. But Gordon Craig in his "First Dialogue" also denies the lyric poet a strong stake in the theatre. So, in contrast to the poet's call for the audience to 'use their ears only', Craig, in *The Arts of the Theatre: The First Dialogue*, asserts that, "The poet is not of the theatre, has never come from the theatre, and cannot be of the theatre, and that only the dramatist among writers has any birth-claim to the theatre".<sup>17</sup>

Pirandello's and Yeats' views against Craig's reveal the war of dominance that ensues once a while between a supper playwright, a super designer, and likewise, a super director. It is a conflicting pride that exists between the originator and the developer. Just like Yeats, Pirandello believes so much in spoken action because of the richness and denseness of poetic verses. He laments as he narrates the following story from a haunted castle:

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 153

<sup>16</sup> Yeats, William. B.. "The Play, The Player, and the Scene". *Dramatic literature and criticism: Greek to Grotowski*. Dukore, B. F. Ed. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, inc., 1974. 656.

<sup>17</sup> Bentley, Eric. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, 1988. 116.

Every night in the castle of Blay one can hear strange noises, quivering, creaking, rustling: suddenly the figures in the tapestries begin to move. The ghostly troubadour and his lady flex their sleeping muscles, leap from the wall, and walk through the castle.<sup>18</sup>

Pirandello wonders why this same scenic action cannot be performed without technical support as Aeschylus did to realize the “gigantic figures of Homer’s epic tapestry”<sup>19</sup> just by narrative action or “lines”.<sup>20</sup> The simple truth is that times have changed, and people require more action, more entertainment, and more spectacle since the wherewithal does nothing but makes the performance better than the script. It is indeed the call of civilization, because Pirandello needed to have seen what designers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century make out of that scene compared to the spectacle he experienced in his time that warranted that outcry. What the 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatre designer offers its audiences is a mind-blowing experience backed by strong technological know-how where “spoken décor” would be one ridiculous experiment in primitive research. The technological application to theatrical performances could not be described in any other words but magical and fantastical. As Biodun Jeyifo observes. “Science has strengthened the magical eternal aspiration of drama; the more sophisticated theatre technology has become, the easier it is to obtain the most astounding poetic and ‘magical’ effects on stage”.<sup>21</sup> What Jeyifo means by “sophistication” is the astounding volume of high wattage speakers, driven by a digitally processed high fidelity sound system that elevate and refine the true effects of Pirandello’s “quivering, creaking, rustling” to meet the expectation of a 20<sup>th</sup> century audience.

Designs are as important as their designer, in fact, they partly reflect his own visions while serving the ideas of the author and play director. Molinta Enendu’s design ideas, draw from a rich historical and academic background to meet the needs of this generation of theatre audiences.

#### **The Designer, Technologist, and a Passion for an Indigenous Label**

Molinta Ojukwu Luke Enendu was born in March, 1950 in Adazi-Ani, Anaocha in Anambra state. He studied drama at the University of Ibadan in 1974.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 153

<sup>19</sup> Bentley, Eric. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, 1988. 153.

<sup>20</sup> Brocket, Oscar. G. *History of the Theatre*. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.1999. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Jeyifo, Biodun. “Magic in African Drama: Thematic Dramaturgical and Epistemological Structures”. *University of Ife seminar series*, (1987) 2.

**Plate 1:** Molinta Enendu



**Source:** Authors File

Molinta Enendu belongs to the new generation of Designers in the Theatre. According to him, having at different times “crewed as apprentice under renowned Theatre designers like Demas Nwoko, Sumbo Marinho, Sola Aborishade and Dexter Lindersay.” The impact of these apprenticeships was to manifest much later when he accepted to work as Senior Technical Officer in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Calabar, and consequently became saddled with the responsibility of designing for the Department’s Dance Company, as well as other departmental productions.

The satisfaction he derived from this short experience as a budding designer, coupled with those of his earlier apprenticeships, and the challenges he envisaged of the future enkindled in him, the desire for more theoretical knowledge in the area of technical theatre. The research, “Scenery Mechanisms and Special Lighting Effects in the Creation of Fantasy”<sup>22</sup> reveals Enendu’s

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<sup>22</sup> Enendu Molinta. Scenery Mechanisms and Special Effects in the Creation of Fantasy in Nigerian Theatre. MA Thesis. Dept. of Theatre Arts, Arts. University of Calabar, 1983. V + 315pp.



interest in the limitless wonders of theatre lights and the manipulative functions of the technological gadgets that make them possible.

Converting from technical position to a lecturing position in 1983, Enendu was set for a career in academics leading to further research studies. His area of interest was in the area of architectural characteristics of Nigerian Theatre Houses where he picked on those inseparable relationships between architecturally provided spaces, theatre productions and their technical realizations within the limits of the total infrastructure for theatre performance. Enendu believes that the architectural encapsulation of space for the theatre has created far more effects beyond that relationship which exist between the performer and the audience to include “the affairs of the mind and spirit of the production staff and their functioning”<sup>23</sup>. These spaces of course, that is, the structures and the equipment in them have implications for theatre experience as theatre design depends largely on the architectural configuration of space.

By 1993, he had stabilized in the mainstream of academics and academic programming. He was between 1993 and 1998, Coordinator of Diploma in Theatre Arts. This added responsibility did not distract him from his technical theatre researches. At this time, he had developed deep interest in theatre installation and fabrication of theatre equipment so much that he was given approval to visit Strand Lighting, London (a leading manufacturer of theatre equipment) in 1994. This visit was a boost to his profile and a good candidate for the Glory Land Project which he executed for the Bayelsa State Government. In addition, the visit enabled him to initiate the contact for a future working relationship, as well as establish a professional association and collaboration in theatre equipment and installation between Strand Lighting and theatre institutions in Nigeria. It also opened up an avenue for indigenous theatre consulting as he took charge, advised and effectively installed stage lighting equipment, intercommunication systems and scenery mechanism for Cross River State Theatre Complex, Calabar on his return in 1994.

The success of this indigenous endeavour in the fabrication of theatre equipment in Calabar generated further interest as it received the patronage of Benue state government in 1998; Enendu was commissioned to install his own fabrication of electromechanical (motorized) house curtain for Benue State Theatre, Makurdi.

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<sup>23</sup> Enendu, Molinta. The Effects of Architectural Structures on Technical Directing in Two Nigerian Universities. Ph.D Thesis. Dept. of Theatre Arts, University of Calabar, 2000. 220

**Plate 2:** Benue Arts Theartre Makurdi.

Motor driver for the stage curtains- A 3.0 H.P. capacity motor drives the pulley for the curtain carriers. It is fitted with a dual direction activator switch that opens and closes the front of house curtains.



**Source:** Photo Courtesy M Enendu

In the same year, he undertook the renovation of the entire complex by reconstructing the wooden stage floor as well as installed new stage décor (curtains and fly system support assembly). He also installed an intelligent stage light system for the same institution. One of the greatest challenges of the Benue project was to make a theatre out of a dilapidated and abandoned “existing space” with a little opportunity for originality except for space management. The sensible thing to do was to convert the space but stay within the space; a mandate he received as a scenic designer that theatres are not rebuilt for every play but rather, every play must fit into the existing space. Like Pericles did to the theatre of Dionysus, Enendu created projections above and below from a third portion of the hall to accommodate modern stage equipped with modern theatrical facilities.

However, the creation of a functional house curtain required an ample overhead space. But over and above other considerations, the stage floor was of special interest; for one reason, this is where builders in Nigeria have gotten theatre architecture wrongly, in most cases, they impose concrete floors on performers. So his emphasis was on the choice of woods, the laying and surface finishing. Enendu’s experience as a set designer taught him that the performer is a sensitive element on the stage floor.

**Plate 3:** The Millennium Square, Calabar decorated for the Cross River State Carnival.



**Source:** Photo Courtesy M Enendu

In the following years (1999-2007), he became synonymous with Cross River State Cultural activities. Perhaps, due to his interest in the areas of lights and environmental aesthetics and decorations, he was invited to design and fabricate the now famous and celebrated Millennium Decorative Lights for Cross River State Millennium Square. That was a testimony of Enendu's versatility and the ability to provide pleasurable entertainment through lighting. This decoration in the front of the Deputy Governor's office proves that such lightings could be enjoyed beyond the ambience of modern theatre structures. It was also a privilege to have received an invitation by a former student of his, Ojo-Rasaki to design and light his play, *Jagunmolu*, a command performance by the Federal Government to mark the handover of government from the military to civil democracy in Abuja, 1999.

**A Project Consultant with a Passion for Indigenous Alternative**

**Plate 4:** Enendu at a workshop Tutorial (2007): Where he physically separates the component parts of a lantern for repair or replacement. This system has enabled the department to retain most of its first generation of stage lighting equipment.



**Source:** Photo by John Iwuh

Enendu is a practical technician, who understands the need for detail. He ensures that his students dissect the structural parts of equipment they work with, especially lighting instruments (Plate 4). He believes that understanding these equipment is the secret to maintaining them until Nigeria begins to manufacture some. Enendu has contributed immensely to ameliorating the dearth of literature experienced in the technical area of Nigerian theatre through high quality contributions to academic and scholarly journals, many having developed from practical demonstration of his researches and technical directorial projects, done in the fervent belief that most design theories can be tested and retested, and that the academic institutions present the most convenient avenue to do so. For instance, he never ceased to seek by practical demonstration, the role of stage mechanisms and their contribution to the realization of the ethereal wonders held culturally or symbolically within drama texts. This curiosity received ample attention in “Scenery Mechanisms and Special Effects in the Creation of Fantasy in Nigerian Theatre” where Enendu “sets out to investigate and observe the results of experiments with the

structures and arrangements of several scenic elements, and special effects...in the creation of fantasy.”<sup>24</sup>

Enendu has nonetheless written sound critiques on many of the plays he has directed, showing the multi-scholastic ability of the theatre designer not only as craftsman, technician and builder but also as a critic. These were responses to the call of scholarship in the deft pursuit to intellectualize his art as the final goal of all theoretical postulations. They appeared in the long list of the many papers he presented at conferences, and also published. At conferences and workshops, Enendu has given his opinions publicly among elite audience on the many tools of communication, verbally and non-verbally stressing theatre scenery as a vital tool of theatre communication. At the Inaugural Conference of African Communication Association (1985), he made his audience ruminate on materially dependent communication. Among the chosen varieties, lighting featured prominently beyond its principal function of revelation to its transformative effects on stage forms and objects; a property through which various dimensions of spectacles are created for theatrical enjoyment.

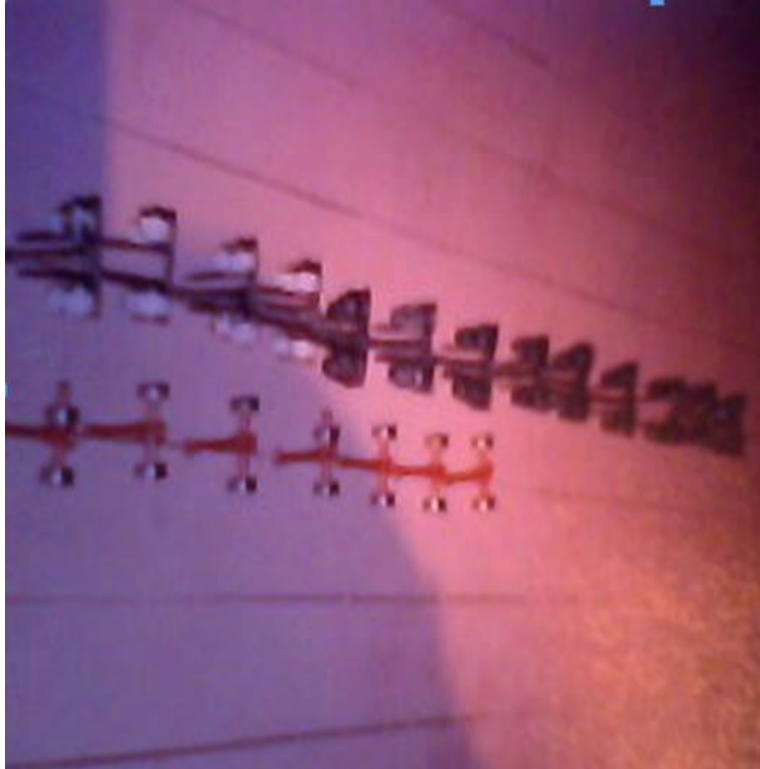
Contrary to the view of many that community theatre remains a market place performance with little or no consideration for technical inputs, Enendu corrects such misconceived impression. In a paper presented at Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA 1989), he maintains that “informal spaces” do not preclude the use of modern theatrical equipment where they exist, stating that “economy” remains a watchword in community theatre performance. However, little technical input is not disregarding their importance but rather to enhance “flexibility”. Design still plays a part in community theatre if only to proffer convenient options to the little hand and stage props.

Enendu has also done a few consultancy jobs. In 1993, Molinta Enendu got a chance to consult for the Cross River State Government in construction the state theatre complex. This is by any standard was a challenging role for any theatre designer in this country. But even more challenging was that he made a case for a local design and fabrication in the area of a theatre front of house curtain. His design and fabrication met the required safety and functional standard, and without delay got the approval to proceed with the installation. Further more, the execution of the design was carried out with outstanding precision to the astonishment of the Architects who initially had recommended foreign theatre consultants to be engaged.

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<sup>24</sup> Enendu Molinta. Scenery Mechanisms and Special Effects in the Creation of Fantasy in Nigerian Theatre. MA Thesis. Dept. of Theatre Arts, Arts. University of Calabar, 1983. V + 315pp.

**Plate 5:** Benue State Theatre. The curtain carriers fabricated from a combination of various improvised metals, include bearings, casing, bicycle parts etc, were put together by skilled blacksmiths and welders.



**Source:** Photo Courtesy, M. Enendu

A further test of Enendu's professional competence came through the Benue State Government where Enendu's humble position withstood the machinations of political actors whose unequivocal preference for foreign consultants and designers belittle Nigerian professionals. In the end, he showed ingenuity in the ability of local theatrical design meeting the challenges of inadequate local theatrical equipment for the local theatre industry when he designed, fabricated and successfully installed the first Nigerian made motorized (electromechanical) House Curtain tabs for Benue State Proscenium Theatre, Makurdi in 1998 (plate 5).

Although the purpose of this study is not economic, there is however, a strong relationship between financial savings arising from local substitute coming from indigenous technology or craftsmanship as demonstrated in Enendu's theatre projects if compared to the foreign exchange expended in counterpart projects executed by foreign consultants and builders. No doubt, part of the attraction for Enendu's proposals lay in this comparative advantage. It should give the state governments a lot of encouragement to take up the long-

abandoned projects especially in the arts. The Cross River State Cultural Centre and The Benue State Arts Complex are cases in point. The relationship being that most projects abandoned in Nigerian are as results of outrageous quotations from foreign based personnel, in collaboration with government officials who have personal interests, the differences in exchange rate notwithstanding.

Until the Benue State Project, Enendu's fame can be said to be within the South-South region of the country only. But owing to the success recorded in both projects, he was by majority opinion commissioned to handle the importation and installation of stage lighting equipment, including décor details and sound facility for the Bayelsa State Cultural Centre. But most importantly, he provided the technical and structural details for the restoration of faulty architectural sections, especially in the areas of siting, security of intensity control units, and the catwalk access to overhead lighting positions. It was a timely and wise decision because Enendu filled the gap to correct the inadequacy, which the local architects often neglected when handling important projects like theatres. Stephen Langley was right when he noted that, "It often seems that the architect ran out of space, money, imagination and all respect for creative comfort when it comes to constructing the facilities for the performers",<sup>25</sup> It was such wonder that a theatre artist by whatever specialty could come with such design details. According to Enendu:

You can hardly blame them; our national attitude is full of misrepresentations. People judge your discipline at face value, not on the content of the curriculum. This presents our educational system as closed; giving the impression that only the architect can design, while the engineer proffers technical knowledge, just as only the accountant can add up figures no matter how elementary. These are all intentional manipulations for personal gains.<sup>26</sup>

The Bayelsa project differs from its Benue counterpart for two main reasons; apart from structural work, all the required technical equipment were foreign; prefabricated and shipped as package units. However, the architectural units were redesigned for theatrical purpose. On the other hand, the Benue State project was a complete departure, hence in addition to detail structural planning, "the stage facilities like house curtain carriers, for instance, were fabricated from a combination of *various scavenged parts*; even bicycle parts."<sup>15</sup> (The curtain carriers consisted of any relevant part of a good quality steel removed from any bicycles or automobiles. Items such as bearings and rods were welded to produce heavy-duty, hard wearing curtain rollers.) Enendu recalls that:

The local contractor in charge refused to award the job to me until the intervention of Richard Tsevende, the Bulgarian trained then Director of culture in Benue State, whose firm

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<sup>25</sup> Langley, Stephen. *Theatre Management in America: Principle and Practice*. New York: Drama Books, 1980. 58

<sup>26</sup> "Interview with Molinta Enendu, August 9, 2007".

conviction remained unshaken following a few demonstration sessions with me, along with my designs of course.<sup>27</sup>

Enendu agrees that physically, the locally fabricated parts are not as smooth as those produced industrially for exports, but they are more rugged and hardwearing than the imported ones which are alloys of various grades of metals for commercial interest. "To me, what is important is functionality and durability. The performance of all my installations remains testimony to my design vision ten years on" (Interview August 9, 2007).<sup>28</sup> It has been painstaking to arrange chronologically; selecting and mentioning a few from the list of Enendu's theatrical activities as a technical director. Within a period of ten years (1980 – 1990), Enendu designed and technically realized over one hundred stage productions mounted in over ten different theatres in Nigeria; beginning of course, from the year he obtained his degree of professional practice. From 1991 – 1993, he designed and executed professionally demanding production in lights, scenery and sound for over fifty stage and television productions across the country.

Although Enendu has designed lights and effects for the production of *Possessed*, a home video, his interest as consummate theatre artist lies unapologetically with stage productions. He has artistically directed several plays for state arts councils, state secondary schools either as commissioned command performance or statewide educational project. For instance, *A Matter of Chance* by Thomas Amkpa (1999) was directed for Sokoto State Arts Council. But he had earlier in 1990 directed Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* for secondary schools in Cross River State. But most importantly, Enendu has directed the following plays for the Theatre Arts Department, University of Calabar: *Diokem* (1992), *The raft* (1988), *Noah built the ark* (1995). In all, he estimates to have handled over two hundred productions for stage or film, either for the university, private or commercial outfits in Nigeria within a period of twenty-two years (1980 – 2002). The bottom-line in the above productions was that for each, he sought to introduce technologically driven aesthetics capable of projecting an unusual appeal beyond the abilities of an average designer. He also sought to provide the wonders of technical interpretations as opposed to the rhetoric of the actor's speech.

### Conclusion

Technical theatre in Nigeria was in the stranglehold of foreign theatre technologists until the emergence of local professionals, which the likes of Duro Oni and Molinta Enendu in particular represented. Their emergence solved the problems of theatre modifications, redesign, and resurfacing of decrepit facilities. Enendu's intervention came through the ingenious deployment of local alternative parts to replace the worn-out originals, and in the process, discovered hard-wearing, and longer-lasting options sourced from waste materials. The visual appearance of the local alternatives, notwithstanding, they possessed enduring compositions that have stood the test of time. However, the political will expected of political appointees to engage local professionals in the

<sup>27</sup> "Interview with Molinta Enendu, August 9, 2007".

<sup>28</sup> "Interview with Molinta Enendu, August 9, 2007".



execution of these projects remains insurmountable. Finally, even though these projects have demonstrated the ability of local theatre designers, the consciousness required of theatre managers of the institutions concerned to maintain them in the long run remains a dream we cannot help linking to Nigeria's poor maintenance culture.